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The Tithe in Scripture

A reading for pastors

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The Tithe in Scripture

A Reading for Pastors from Moses to Jesus and the Apostles

Phone reading edition

Pastors, our responsibility is to handle the Word of God faithfully. The first believers continued in the apostles' teaching, and Paul instructed Timothy to handle the word of truth accurately. As we teach about tithing and giving, we must attend to what each passage actually commands, whom it addresses, and the purpose it states. This reading follows the biblical record from the patriarchs through Moses, Jesus, and the apostles. (Acts 2:42; 2 Timothy 2:15)

A tithe is a tenth. Before the law was given through Moses, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth after returning from battle. Hebrews identifies this as a tenth of the spoils. Jacob later vowed to give God a tenth of all that God would give him. Scripture records Abraham's act and Jacob's vow; neither account states a recurring command for every believer to pay a tenth of monetary wages. We should preserve

both what these accounts record and the limits of what they say. (Genesis 14:18–20; Genesis 28:20–22; Hebrews 7:1–4)

In the law, God specified the tithe's contents. Leviticus names the seed of the land, the fruit of the trees, and every tenth animal passing under the rod. The livestock tithe was not selected according to whether an animal was good or bad. The chapter closes by identifying these as commandments given through Moses at Mount Sinai for the children of Israel. These verses describe agricultural produce and livestock; they do not state a percentage of a worker's wages. (Leviticus 27:30–34)

God also specified who received the tithe and why. He gave Israel's tithes to the Levites as their inheritance in connection with their service at the tabernacle, because they had no territorial inheritance among the other Israelites. The Levites, in turn, were to offer a tenth of what they received and give the Lord's portion to Aaron the priest. Their households could eat the remainder as the provision for their service. The biblical arrangement includes both the people's responsibility and

the responsibility of those receiving the tithe. (Numbers 18:20–32)

Deuteronomy also describes a tithe eaten before the Lord. The people were to bring the tithe of their grain, wine, and oil to the place God chose, eat before Him, and learn to fear Him. Their households were to rejoice, and the Levite was not to be neglected. At the end of every third year, the tithe of that year's increase was to be stored within their towns so that the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow could eat and be satisfied. Teaching the tithe faithfully requires acknowledging these provisions for worship, shared meals, and care for vulnerable people. (Deuteronomy 14:22–29)

Money appears in these laws in specific ways. If the journey was too long to carry the tithe, the Israelite could exchange it for money, travel to the appointed place, and spend it on provisions to eat before the Lord with the household. Leviticus also allowed someone to redeem a produce tithe by paying its value with an additional fifth; the animal tithe could not be redeemed. These provisions concern

transporting or redeeming an existing tithe. Neither passage states a general command to tithe monetary wages. (Deuteronomy 14:24–26; Leviticus 27:31–33)

Malachi must also be read with its named audience and setting. God addresses the descendants of Jacob and rebukes the nation for withholding tithes and offerings. He commands them to bring the tithes into the storehouse so there will be food in His house. The following promise concerns the produce of their ground and the fruitfulness of their vines. Nehemiah likewise records Judah bringing tithes of grain, wine, and oil into the storerooms. These details belong to the biblical command itself. (Malachi 3:6–12; Nehemiah 13:12)

When Jesus addressed tithing, He spoke plainly. In Matthew 23:23 He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for tithing mint, anise, and cumin while neglecting justice, mercy, and faith. He said, “these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Luke 11:42 gives the corresponding rebuke concerning herbs, justice, and the love of God. Jesus

affirmed that those He addressed should not neglect tithing. He also condemned their neglect of the weightier matters. We must preserve both parts of His instruction. Neither passage specifies a tithe of monetary wages. (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42)

As the biblical account continues, Jesus identifies the cup at the Last Supper with the new covenant in His blood. Hebrews calls Him the mediator of a better covenant and states that, in speaking of a new covenant, God has made the first old. The same letter explains that a change in priesthood entails a change in law. These statements belong alongside the earlier tithe laws when we follow the Scriptures into the apostolic instruction concerning Christ and His people. (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 7:11–14; Hebrews 8:6–13)

Hebrews 7 itself returns to Abraham's tithe. The writer uses it to show Melchizedek's greatness in relation to Abraham and Levi, and then explains the superiority and permanence of Christ's priesthood. Verse 5 expressly connects the Levitical collection of tithes with the law. The chapter discusses tithes, but

contains no instruction telling its readers to pay ten percent of their monetary income to a church. Its stated argument concerns the priesthood and the saving ministry of Jesus. (Hebrews 7:1–28)

The apostles nevertheless give clear instructions concerning the support of ministry. Paul refers to those who served in the temple and then states that the Lord ordained that those preaching the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. He tells those receiving instruction to share good things with their teacher. He also directs that elders who lead well, especially those laboring in teaching, receive double honor, and cites the worker's right to wages. These passages establish the responsibility to support gospel workers; they do not specify a ten-percent assessment. (1 Corinthians 9:13–14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17–18)

Paul also gives practical instructions for a collection intended for believers in Jerusalem. Each person was to set something aside on the first day of the week according to how God had prospered that person. The gift was to be

prepared in advance and carried by approved representatives. The stated instruction concerns regular preparation, individual participation, and giving according to prosperity. It does not name a fixed percentage. (1 Corinthians 16:1–4)

In addressing this ministry of giving, Paul points to the grace of Jesus Christ. He tells the Corinthians to complete their intended gift according to what they have. Willingness is accepted in relation to a person's actual means, and he explains that his purpose is not to relieve others by placing the givers under hardship. Their present abundance is to supply the needs of others. (2 Corinthians 8:9–15)

Paul then urges generous sowing and giving that is decided in the heart. He writes, "not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." He connects God's provision with an abundance of good works, generosity toward others, the needs of the saints being supplied, and thanksgiving to God. These are the purposes and manner of giving stated in the passage. (2 Corinthians 9:6–12)

When we teach these texts, we can state their instructions precisely. Israel received defined tithe laws. Jesus affirmed tithing to the scribes and Pharisees He addressed while requiring justice, mercy, faith, and love. The apostles instructed churches to support ministry and give generously for those in need. The giving instructions examined here do not state a requirement that every Christian pay ten percent of monetary income. Applying that percentage as a universal church requirement is a further conclusion; it should not be presented as an express command contained in these passages. (Leviticus 27:30–34; Matthew 23:23; 1 Corinthians 9:13–14; 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 9:6–12)

Peter's instruction speaks directly to us as pastors. We are to shepherd God's flock willingly, without greed, and by example rather than domination. Christ is the Chief Shepherd to whom we answer. Let our teaching about money reflect that responsibility, and let our own conduct demonstrate the generosity and care we ask of the congregation. (1 Peter 5:1–4)

Does Luke 6:38 command a monetary tithe?

Expanded study - read Luke 6:27-38 as one continuous teaching

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over...” *Luke 6:38, KJV excerpt*

The verse continues with an overflowing gift received into one's bosom and a corresponding measure returned to the giver. Read the whole verse, including its final sentence, and then read the preceding verses. The subject is wider than a church collection.

Follow Jesus' words in their setting

Verses 27-31: Love enemies, do good, bless, pray, give, and treat others as you would have them treat you.
Verses 32-35: Do not limit kindness or lending to people from whom you expect repayment.
Verse 36: Be merciful as your Father is merciful.
Verse 37: Do not condemn; forgive.
Verse 38: Give generously; the measure you use will be measured back to you.

What this establishes, and what it does not

Jesus commands generosity and describes an abundant return. Material giving belongs within this teaching, so it would be too narrow to say it concerns only judging and forgiveness. Nevertheless, the passage names no tithe, ten-percent rate, salary calculation, or required payment to a pastor. **Applying it to financial generosity is reasonable; treating it as a command to pay a compulsory ten-percent church levy goes beyond its wording.**

Compare the apostolic teaching

Paul recalls Jesus' teaching that giving is more blessed than receiving while urging help for the weak. His collection instructions connect God's provision with good works, care for people in need, further generosity, and thanksgiving. They encourage trust and generosity without supplying a guaranteed cash multiplier or a deadline for personal profit. *(Acts 20:33-35; 2 Corinthians 9:6-12)*

Pastoral conclusion: Luke 6:38 supports generous giving. It does not establish a ten-percent monetary requirement, identify a pastor as the necessary recipient, or authorize selling a promised financial return. These are conclusions drawn from what the passage includes and omits, not additional words spoken by Jesus.

Read the passage: Luke 6:27-38

Does not tithing mean not loving God?

Test the claim against Jesus and the apostles

Not paying a ten-percent income tithe to a church does not, by itself, prove that a person does not love God. Scripture connects love with obedience and practical generosity, but the passages below do not define love by a fixed payment.

Jesus rebuked tithers who neglected love

In Luke 11:42, the Pharisees tithed herbs yet neglected justice and the love of God. Jesus told them to practice the weightier duties without neglecting tithing. Thus, paying a tithe did not itself demonstrate the love they lacked. Paul likewise says that even giving away all one's possessions can be done without love. *(Luke 11:42; Matthew 23:23; 1 Corinthians 13:3)*

Love obeys Christ, but a command must first be established

Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” This establishes obedience as an expression of love. It does not by itself establish that every Christian is commanded to pay ten percent of wages to a church. That additional claim must be demonstrated from the relevant passages rather than assumed. *(John 14:15)*

Generosity can reveal love

John challenges anyone who has material means, sees a brother in need, and refuses compassion. Paul also appeals to the sincerity of the Corinthians' love and urges them to complete their promised help. We must retain these demands: disputing a tithe requirement is no excuse for greed or indifference. Neither writer assigns ten percent as the measure of love in these instructions. *(1 John 3:16-18; 2 Corinthians 8:8-12, 24)*

The giver's means and responsibilities matter

Paul measures the willing gift by what a person has, and says his purpose is not to ease others by burdening the givers. Jesus condemned the use of a religious gift designation, Corban, to evade care for parents; Paul also requires care for one's household. Teaching about giving must account for these duties together. *(2 Corinthians 8:12-15; Mark 7:9-13; 1 Timothy 5:8)*

Pastoral conclusion: We may challenge selfishness and encourage faithful support of ministry and people in need. We cannot establish a person's lack of love merely by pointing to a missing ten-percent payment. A person may freely choose ten percent as a giving discipline; that choice should not be turned into an unproved universal test of love. *(1 Corinthians 9:14; 2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Peter 5:2-3)*

Testing common claims about tithing

Distinguish the biblical statement from a further theological conclusion

Abraham tithed before Moses, so every Christian owes ten percent.

Abraham gave a tenth of battle spoils; Jacob made a personal vow. These accounts precede Moses, but neither states a recurring salary-tithe command for every believer. (Genesis 14:18-20; 28:20-22; Hebrews 7:1-4)

Jesus commanded tithing, so every church member owes a salary tithe.

Jesus affirmed tithing to the scribes and Pharisees He addressed. The named items are herbs. Applying that instruction as a universal salary rule requires a further argument about covenant and audience. (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42)

Malachi proves that every Christian who does not tithe money is cursed.

Malachi addresses Jacob's descendants and the nation, with a storehouse, food, crops, and vines. Applying that covenant sanction to every Christian's paycheck is not an express statement of the text. (Malachi 3:6-12; compare Galatians 3:13-14)

Hebrews 7 commands us to pay our monetary tithes to Jesus.

The chapter uses tithes to explain Melchizedek, Levi, and Christ's superior priesthood. It gives no instruction to its readers to pay ten percent of wages to a church. (Hebrews 7:1-28)

Paul's temple analogy fixes the amount at ten percent.

Paul establishes the right of gospel workers to receive support. The parallel in verses 13-14 does not specify a rate or transfer every Levitical regulation to churches. (1 Corinthians 9:7-14; Galatians 6:6)

Ananias was judged for failing to pay a required percentage.

Peter identifies a lie to God and says the property and sale proceeds were under Ananias' control. The passage does not identify an unpaid tithe as his offense. (Acts 5:1-4)

The burden of proof: The question is whether Scripture commands every Christian to pay a ten-percent tithe on monetary income to a church. Biblical support for giving and ministry provision is clear; the fixed percentage requires an additional interpretive argument. Christians who disagree should identify that argument honestly instead of presenting an inference as a quotation from Jesus or the apostles.

When did money become the standard?

Historical appendix - evidence about church practice, not an additional source of doctrine

There is no single worldwide starting date. The history of giving money, compulsory church tithes, converting agricultural tithes into cash, and modern income-based tithing involves different developments in different places.

Early Christian witnesses

The *Didache*, chapter 13, calls for firstfruits to support prophets and teachers, including gifts of money, without specifying ten percent. Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, chapter 67, describes willing contributors providing for those in need. Tertullian's *Apology*, chapter 39, describes voluntary contributions according to ability. These post-apostolic witnesses document particular practices; they are neither Scripture nor proof that every early church followed an identical system. [H1-H3]

Sixth to eighth centuries - requirements in the Latin West

Historical research traces a fixed tithe obligation in Gaul to the sixth century. Church councils at Tours in 567 and Macon in 585 addressed tithes. Charlemagne's Capitulary of Herstal in 779 supplied a secular legal requirement. These are milestones in the development of compulsory tithing, not dates when the whole Christian world began paying a monetary salary tithe. [H4]

1836 - a specific English and Welsh change

The Tithe Commutation Act converted remaining tithes paid in produce into monetary rentcharges in England and Wales. The commissioners also investigated cash commutations that had already occurred. Thus, 1836 marks a major legal conversion of an agricultural system; it does not mark the first time Christians gave money or the origin of every modern church's practice. [H5]

Nineteenth-century American income tithing

An official Adventist historical account documents advocacy of income tithing in the 1870s, including publications by Presbyterian advocates. A clearly dated denominational example is the Seventh-day Adventist decision in 1876 to call for a tenth of income, followed by detailed guidance in 1878 and implementation of the revised plan in 1879. This is one documented development, not a claim that Adventists invented all Christian tithing. [H6]

Historical finding: Modern cash tithing developed through changing church rules, economic arrangements, and denominational teaching. The examples above establish no universal adoption date. The biblical question remains whether a particular requirement is actually commanded in the texts being preached.

A charge to pastors and sources for study

Teach generosity with truth, compassion, and accountability

Pastors may teach faithful financial support of gospel workers, regular giving, help for the poor, and generosity according to one's means. Those responsibilities are explicit in the apostolic instruction. They do not authorize us to invent a ten-percent command where a passage supplies none. *(1 Corinthians 9:14; 16:1-4; Galatians 6:6; 2 Corinthians 8:12-15; 9:7)*

The position argued in this reading is that the cited texts do not establish a universal Christian tithe on monetary income. Christians differ over whether a continuing tithe principle should be inferred from them. That disagreement should be addressed through careful reasoning, not assumed motives, promises of guaranteed profit, or a blanket declaration that non-tithers do not love God.

Peter calls shepherds to willing service without greed or domination. Paul arranged for others to participate in handling the collection so that its administration would be honorable before God and people. Let the ministry's use of money reflect the same accountability asked of its members. *(1 Peter 5:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:18-21)*

Historical references

The historical appendix uses the following sources only to document developments after the New Testament. Numbered references correspond to the preceding page. Links open the source texts.

[H1] Didache, chapter 13, Support of Prophets. Early Christian source in English translation. Includes firstfruits of money and possessions.

[H2] Justin Martyr, First Apology, chapter 67. Early Christian source describing contributions by those willing and able.

[H3] Tertullian, Apology, chapter 39. Early Christian source describing voluntary support and care for people in need.

[H4] Ingrid Ivarsen, Aethelstan, Wulfstan and a revised history of tithes in England. Early Medieval Europe 29.2 (2021), 225-252. See the discussion of sixth-century Gaul, church councils, and Herstal (779).

[H5] The National Archives, Tithes. Official research guide, section 2. Explains the 1836 conversion and earlier commutations in England and Wales.

[H6] Johannes Kovar, Systematic Benevolence. Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists (2021). See The Last Steps toward Tithing (1876-1879) and Developments in Other Churches. Used as historical evidence, not as doctrinal authority.

Scripture quotations are KJV; unquoted explanations are summaries or reasoned conclusions. Historical sources checked November 19, 2026.